



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 W. 15th STREET, SUITE 3200
HELENA, MONTANA 59626

SDMS Document ID



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July 2, 2002

Ref: 8MO

Senator Max Baucus
Attn: Patty Bean
Federal Building, Room 114
32 East Babcock
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Ms. Bean,

Thank you for referring Dean Massey's May 20, 2002 letter to me for response. Mr. Massey is among many people who are concerned with the potentially-contaminated vermiculite insulation they have in their homes. Upon looking into options to remove it, they find that it is very costly.

The media attention on the health risks of vermiculite in Libby has rightly caught people's attention. As you know, the situation in Libby has been studied intensively for two-and-a-half years and EPA's May 2002 decision to remove vermiculite insulation from Libby homes and businesses was not made easily. There is no "new program" per se, but rather a huge response action under EPA's Superfund clean-up authority that is taking place in Libby.

EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman made the decision to remove the insulation from Libby homes and businesses based on a number of circumstances that, to our knowledge, are unique to Libby. The unique aspects include: the high number of people who worked in the mine; the town's proximity to the mine all throughout its operating years; the presence of two processing plants which operated near town; the abundance of vermiculite found in yards, gardens, driveways, schoolyards and other places; and the geographic location.

EPA is not removing vermiculite from homes across the United States. The special authority to expand the cleanup effort in Libby is based on the above-mentioned factors and attempts to ensure that people who are already ill or at high risk for asbestos-related disease are not further exposed even to small amounts of asbestos.

EPA is recommending that people in other locations who find vermiculite insulation in their homes do not disturb it. If they wish to have it removed, it is best done by licensed and certified asbestos abatement professionals. This can be costly as Mr. Massey has discovered, but is a cost that must be assumed by homeowners, much like the cost of removing other types of asbestos (heating duct insulation, or floor tiles) or the cost of removing lead-based paint. Unfortunately, EPA does not provide financial assistance in removing any of these materials.

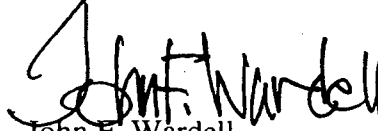


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For context, I am enclosing EPA's May 9, 2002 press release announcing Administrator Whitman's decision to expand clean-up operations in Libby to include removal of contaminated vermiculite insulation from people's homes.

Please don't hesitate to call or have Mr. Massey call me at 406-457-5001 if you have further questions or concerns. You or Mr. Massey may also call Wendy Thomi, the Community Involvement Coordinator for the Libby site, at 406-457-5037.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Wardell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John F. Wardell

Director

Montana Office

United States
Environmental Protection Agency
Region 8

Montana Office
10 W. 15th St.
Suite 3200
Helena, Montana 59626

John Wardell, Director

Environmental News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts: Jack McGraw, EPA, 303-312-6308
Wendy Thomi, EPA, 406-439-6142

EPA Action Update #13

May 9, 2002

EPA Expands Clean-up Activities in Libby

Helena, MT - U.S. EPA Administrator Christie Whitman approved in Washington, D.C. today an expanded clean-up plan for Libby, Montana including removal of asbestos-containing soil in yards, school grounds and parks as well as the targeted removal of asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation from Libby homes and businesses. This action is due to the uniqueness of the widespread and pervasive asbestos contamination in the former mining town of 6,000 residents. The death rate from asbestos-related disease in the Libby area is among the highest in the nation.

EPA believes that chronic exposure to high levels of asbestos for decades has compromised the health of many Libby residents. Gov. Whitman said, "I am deeply concerned about the serious on-going public health issues related to asbestos contamination in Libby. When I visited Libby in September last year, I told citizens we were with them for the long haul. This action continues our commitment."

Noting work continuing at the site, the Administrator stated Region VIII would expand the cleanup activities in Libby to address all sources of asbestos where exposure may still take place, including vermiculite insulation in targeted buildings and homes. This action is necessary because an EPA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry investigation indicated that people in Libby have been chronically exposed to asbestos by multiple exposure "pathways" for many years and that cumulative exposures may be contributing to asbestos-related health effects - some 14 sources of exposures have been documented, including: home insulation, gardens, driveways, tracked-in material, house dust with higher concentrations of asbestos than allowed in occupational settings, and fill for baseball fields and running tracks. These exposures are made worse by local climate and topographic features that create long-term and frequent air inversions in the Libby valley.

(more)

Region VIII Deputy Regional Administrator Jack McGraw said, "Given what we've learned in Libby, it is very important for the Agency to address all forms of exposure necessary to reduce the risks that these people face everyday. I admire the spirit and appreciate the cooperation of the community."

Work will begin later this summer in the downtown Libby area closest to the former export plant, working outward through the site. EPA will give priority to properties where people are exposed in several ways or with high asbestos concentrations, or a current condition or use that may produce high concentrations in the air.

Over the past two years, the Agency has spent approximately \$20 million to clean up several plants; an equipment salvage location; three schools, including athletic tracks and spectator stands; six homes; and other contaminated properties. The total cost for removal actions including insulation may reach as high as \$55 million.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the U.S. Public Health Service have cooperated with EPA in ongoing exposure investigations in Libby. ATSDR and the Public Health Service are also working with local physicians, Lincoln County government, and the State Medical Officer will be following a group of patients to examine the clinical progression of the disease. This will focus on identifying the nature, presentation and progression of the disease endpoints from exposure to asbestos. In addition, EPA continues to work with the Department of Health and Human Services to provide appropriate resources to local health providers. In Libby, mortality from asbestosis occurs about 40-60 times above the expected level; and mesothelioma, a rare type of cancer strongly associated with asbestos exposure, is about a thousand times higher than expected.

In general, for homes outside of Libby, EPA continues to believe that the best strategy for asbestos containing materials in buildings is to leave it in place, unless removal is necessary to prevent disturbance during renovations. Vermiculite insulation is shaped like a small nugget, and varies in color from silver-gold to grey-brown. It can be commonly found in homes as loose fill in attics and walls. Only trained professionals using microscopic examination can see the asbestos fibers in the vermiculite insulation. Homeowners should refrain from disturbing any asbestos material. EPA recommends having inspection or removal done professionally. For more information, consult: www.epa.gov/asbestos/ or the TSCA hotline on: 202 554-1404.

In January 2002, Montana Governor Judy Martz designated Libby as the state's highest priority for cleanup and requested that the site be included on the EPA's Superfund National Priorities List; the Agency proposed the site to the NPL on February 26. Updates regarding the Libby project can be found at: <http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/libby/>

MAX BAUCUS
MONTANA

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2802

INTERNET:
max@baucus.senate.gov
http://www.senate.gov/~baucus

June 25, 2002

Mr. Dave Kirkpatrick
Community Relations Liaison
EPA
Butte Silver Bow Court House
Butte, Montana 59701

Dear Dave:

I am sending the enclosed communication from one of my constituents, Dean Massey, for your consideration. I would very much appreciate your comments on this matter.

Please direct your reply and any questions to my Bozeman office at the address and phone numbers provided below:

Senator Max Baucus
Federal Building, Room 114
32 East Babcock
Bozeman, MT 59715
406-586-6104; fax 406-587-9177

Thank you for your assistance.

With best personal regards, I am

Sincerely,



MSB/aad

BILLINGS
(406) 657-6790

BOZEMAN
(406) 586-6104

BUTTE
(406) 782-8700

GREAT FALLS
(406) 761-1574

HELENA
(406) 443-3480

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(406) 766-1150

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(406) 329-3123

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EPA ready to remove asbestos in Libby

By ERICKA SCHENCK SMITH

LIBBY, Mont., Aug. 21 (AP) — It wasn't the public health emergency declaration everyone had been waiting for, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday it had found a legal way to remove asbestos-containing insulation and soils from homes and businesses in Libby. "This means that there's an end in sight," said Libby Mayor David Thomas. "The community is going to be cleaned up. The community is going to be able to go on once this is done." Thomas worked for 12 years at the W.R. Grace and Co. vermiculite mine in Libby, which has since been blamed for hundreds of illnesses and at least 200 deaths due to exposure to asbestos that contaminated the vermiculite ore. W.R. Grace bought the vermiculite mine in 1963 and operated it until it closed in 1990. Zonolite insulation was one of the primary products produced using vermiculite from the mine, and hundreds of Libby houses are insulated with Zonolite. Many in Libby used vermiculite from the mine to condition the soils in their gardens. EPA Administrator Christine Whitman made the decision to remove Zonolite from Libby-area homes and businesses early Thursday, and regional officials outlined their plans to about 150 Libby residents during a town meeting later in the evening. The insulation and soil removal will be done as part of the federal agency's five-year cleanup operation for the town, which is expected to be officially listed as a Superfund site later this year. Gov. Judy Martz and all three members of Montana's congressional delegation praised the decision in statements Thursday afternoon. "This announcement truly shows the commitment that our administration and the Bush administration have to the people of Libby," Martz said. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., said in a statement that the announcement brings "peace of mind for homeowners... hope for the future." Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., said he "applauds the decision."

Please see Libby, 9A

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was "pleased to see the people of Libby get this support."

And Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., said in a phone interview: "They're setting aside bureaucratic process of making decisions and going in and actually helping."

For the past several months, the EPA has been debating whether to declare a public health emergency for Libby, previously thought to be the only way for the agency to legally gain authority to remove both the insulation and contaminated soils from private homes and businesses. The emergency declaration had become a contentious issue, however, and officials said Whitman's decision

Thursday allows the agency to clean up private properties without waiting out a lengthy battle.

"The public health emergency carries with it a whole lot of other implications," said EPA Region VIII Regional Administrator Jack McGraw. McGraw said Libby is the only place in the United States where people were exposed to asbestos from so many sources. Because of the cumulative effect of asbestos exposure on people's health, he said it makes sense to remove any source of asbestos during cleanup operations there, including getting rid of asbestos-contaminated insulation and soils.

Dr. Brad Black, Lincoln County health officer and director of the local asbestos-related diseases clinic, said he is concerned that, without the emergency declaration, the town still doesn't have full assurance that

the cleanup will be completed.

"We were told (by Whitman) earlier this year that Libby had to have a special declaration of a public health emergency in order to come into private establishments," Black said. He added: "What we'd like to see is to have this formally placed in writing who will be the final legal authority and take ultimate responsibility."

Thom said he wasn't particularly concerned that a public health emergency was not declared. "This will be a blessing for the community in the long term — and, now, the not-so-long term," Thom said.

Gayla Benefield, a Libby activist who has been pushing for the emergency declaration, called the new plan "startling." "This isn't everything that we wanted, but it's a giant step," Benefield said.

Many of those in attendance at the public meeting said they were worried about what would happen to their homes, and whether they could be assured that their homes were clean when the EPA left. Paul Leonard, who supervises the emergency cleanup operations that have been ongoing in Libby since 1999, said there is no way that every trace of asbestos can be removed from a home, but that the agency will do its best to reasonably ensure that homes and businesses are safe and do not present future exposure risks.

There will, of course, be those who refuse to allow the EPA to sample or clean up their properties. Jim Christensen, who will supervise cleanup for the town's Superfund operations, said he expects most people will allow the agency onto their property by the time the cleanup is done.

nated insulation in homes and businesses in Libby.

"This means that there's an end in sight," said Libby resident LeRoy Thom. "The community is going to be cleaned up, and the community is going to be able to go on once this is done."

Thom worked for 17 years at the W.R. Grace and Co. vermiculite mine in Libby that has since been blamed for hundreds of illnesses and at least 200 deaths due to exposure to asbestos that contaminated the vermiculite ore. W.R. Grace bought the vermiculite mine in 1963 and operated it until it closed in 1990.

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"This announcement truly shows the commitment that our administration and the Bush administration have to the people of Libby," Martz said.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., said in a statement that the announcement brings

To: Senator Max Baucus

5/20/02

From: Dean Massey
12977 Cottonwood Rd.
Bozeman, MT 59718
406-763-5466

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter to ask you and your office for assistance in solving a problem my family and I are experiencing. Recently we have discovered that our house contains an attic insulation that contains asbestos fibers. The analytical company that evaluated our insulation stated that it is the same kind that is being found in the town of Libby. My family and I would like to have this dangerous material removed from our house. We have contacted several companies that do that type of work and have found that it is quite expensive.

Previously, I had contacted your office in Bozeman and was helped by Mandy Drysdale. She made several calls on my behalf and gave me many reference numbers for me to check about asbestos removal. Though these contacts were informative, they did not offer any information about programs that might help offset the cost of asbestos removal. More recently though, I read an article in the Billings Gazette, (5/10/02) that the E.P.A. is going to remove the same type of insulation from homes in Libby, MT. In light of this new information, I am asking for your help in finding out if this new program might benefit my family.

Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely,
Dean C. Massey

